SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

Saron's Mission: ***Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!!***

Reverend James E. Smith, Pastor
Cell: 269-816-3870
Email: pastorjames@saronlutheran.org

Amanda Bradley, Communications Director
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll.marcus17@gmail.com

Beth Gray, Organist/Pianist
Email: egrayroll@gmail.com

Ken Boyd, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

Mackenzie Dressander, Nursery Director
Email: mackenzie.trail99@gmail.com

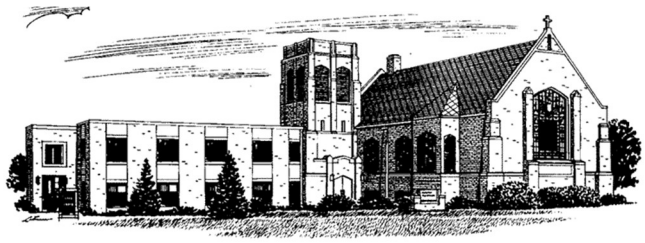
Typical Sunday at Saron:

Fall, Winter and Spring **(through May 17, 2026):**
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40am-10:30am Adult Bible Study
10am-10:45am Learning Hour for Ages 3-8th Grade
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer Schedule (**begins May 25, 2026**):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Yehiel Curry,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia



Sweet Dreams

Christmas is *dreamy*. That goes whether you are a child expecting a visit from St. Nicholas with "visions of sugar-plums danc[ing] in [your] head," or you are Clara fending off the Mouse King in the *Nutcracker*, or whether you are dreaming with Irving Berlin of a white Christmas—please just keep I-94 clear.

The Bible is chock-full of dreams, too. In our Sunday school classes, the kids recently heard the story of Joseph, who, before and after his amazing technicolor dreamcoat, was known for his prophetic dreams. Matthew's Gospel is full of dreams—starting with another dreamer named Joseph. When St. Joseph found his betrothed Mary was pregnant, he was ready to quietly dismiss her, but *was warned in a dream by an angel* not to leave her. After Jesus was born, he was warned in a dream to flee the wrathful King Herod and go to Egypt, and after the crisis had passed, he was, yep, told in a dream it was ok to return to Nazareth. The Magi dreamt similar dreams. Decades later, even Pontius Pilate's wife warned Pilate to have nothing to do with Jesus because she had a dream concerning him. Did he listen? Well, that's another story.

Christian dreaming culminates on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came down on the first apostles, and Peter said that it all fulfilled Joel's prophecy that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, "your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." Christians have been dreaming ever since—most notably the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King had a dream that one day we would all "sit down at the table of brotherhood" and "not be judged by the color of [our] skin, but by the content of [our] character."

This Advent, my encouragement is: dream on. Dreams expand our idea of what is possible. Moreover, dreams come *to* us; we don't plot them out ourselves. And if the stories of Christmas teach us anything, it's that when we're open to the Holy Spirit, God has plenty to tell us. Our Advent readings from Isaiah will have plenty to say about God's dreams: peace, justice, *Shalom* for all. May God's dream for this world become our own.

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas!
Pr. James E. Smith

General Information

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor James E. Smith
Monday – Thursday
Hours may vary. Appointments are great!
Amanda Bradley (Admin Assistant):
Mondays & Thursdays 10am-2pm
Ken Boyd (Bookkeeper):
Thursday Mornings and by Appointment
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)

If you or your loved one is need of a visit or pastoral care, please contact Pastor James at 269-816-3870.

Specific questions or concerns may be directed to an appropriate council member or committee liaison:
President – Fran Bolson
Vice President – Erik Bergh
Secretary – Claudia Staude
Treasurer – Ed Brunner
Worship – Marilyn Frey
Learning – Fran Bolson or Scott Gaspari
Outreach – Jim Manore
Facilities – Steve Cook or Ed Brunner
Youth – Chuck Knebl
Support – Jim Manore or Ed Brunner
Hospitality – Merrily Smith or Claudia Staude

Caring and Sharing

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!

12/2 Victor Coar
12/2 Isen Helmuth
12/8 Lee Carter
12/9 Piper Gray-Roll
12/11 Robert Deaton
12/12 Cynthia Brown
12/12 Edward Brunner
12/13 Eric Standen
12/13 Deb Standen
12/14 Finnegan Gray-Roll
12/16 Charles Pater
12/16 Caden Zwar
12/20 Janet Boyd
12/21 K.T. Alexander
12/29 Paxton Zwar
12/31 Kristen Harper

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!

12/18 Dennis & Colleen Lundgren
12/18 Heather & Steve Pudell
12/26 Brian & Marybeth Culverhouse
12/29 Edmund & Claudia Staude
12/30 Judy & Mark Wedde

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

Saron Church Women will be having a bake sale in the narthex on **Sunday, December 14** after and between both services. All proceeds will go to the **Saron Mentor Family Fund**. Please bring a baked item and, hopefully, make a purchase. This would be a good time to make Christmas treats! It is extremely helpful if you label your treat donations and note any potential allergens. Also, cakes and pies sell faster when cut into plated serving pieces.

We will continue to collect monetary donations on the following Sunday, December 21. Thank you in advance for your support. It is very much appreciated!

Mark your calendar for **Sunday, January 25, 2026**! We will join together to hear council and committee reports, approve the 2026 spending plan, elect new council members, and more! Watch for details in the January Newsletter and future emails.

Church Decorating
Wednesday, December 10 after the 6:15pm Soup Supper

Special thanks to the following individuals for sacrificing part of your Saturday to help prepare Saron's grounds for the winter: Jim Manore, Brad Frey, Keith Stevens, Ed Staude, Matt Bradley, Amy Nelson, Rick & Linda Taylor, Joe Ulrey, Jamie Svab and Marilyn Lucy. You rock! And leaf…

Mary Alice and Amanda tied with variations of pecan pie. Keith's was the cutest!

We had a fantastic turnout for our 1st (hopefully annual) Great Thanksgiving Pic Bake! We had eleven tasty entries!

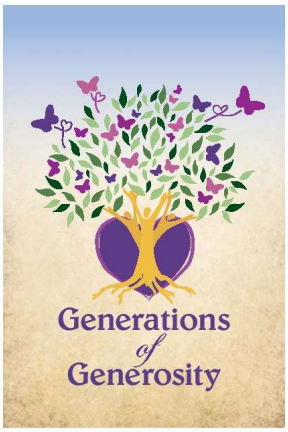
ELCA Good Gifts: Goats and piglets and chicks, oh my!

Vulnerable communities in Africa and other parts of the world continue to face food insecurity and famine. The ELCA Good Gifts program endorsed by Saron delivers gifts of goats ($50), piglets ($30), honeybees ($20), and chicks ($10) that help families escape hunger for good. Simply fill out the form in your bulletin or next to the Good Gifts Christmas tree in the narthex. You can also contact the office. Take a matching ornament from the tree if you'd like a symbol of your gift. Contact Jim Manore with any questions at 269/861-5814.

Please make checks payable to Saron Lutheran Church with "ELCA Good Gifts" as the memo. Once all the donations are collected, we'll send them to the ELCA and your animals will be on their way to a new home!

Thank You!

You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:11)



We sincerely appreciate all of the hard work that went into the fall 2025 stewardship season, *Generations of Generosity*. The time and effort of many people were needed to pull off the weekly videos, the Stewardship Moments during Sunday services, the prayer labyrinth, the *Día de los Muertos* celebration, and more. It was so gratifying to see so many of the congregation actively involved in this year's focus!

Thank you all for sharing in this year's journey and for your commitments to contribute time, talents, and treasures to Saron during 2026. The willingness of our members and friends to be open and vulnerable and to share their individual gifts is extraordinary. We start Saron's second 150-years knowing that generosity is alive and well!

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Wintertime Thoughts on Stewardship

Last year at this time, Saron was still without a full-time pastor, but we were blessed with great guest pastors. One particular message from Pastor Jim Foster resonated with me at the time and I still think of it often. I wish I had the actual text, but to paraphrase, he said something like, "What we practice in church on Sundays is how we should live our lives throughout the week." Think about it.

Pastor Jim used the example of communion. No one crowds and shoves to be first in line. No one expects to receive higher quality wine or bread because of their status. There is always room at the table. There is enough bread and wine to serve everyone. All are welcome.

Contrast that with today's world. People routinely crowd and shove to be first (C'mon, cut that guy off at the four-way stop!). Many people expect special treatment because of their wealth or appearance or title. People routinely go hungry when resources are not shared. Many people are not welcomed, but rather are the subject of discrimination and hate.

What does this have to do with stewardship? Everything. As we often say, stewardship is not a season nor is it just about raising money, it's a way of life. Our individual view of the obligation to be a good steward of all that God has given us essentially dictates how we live our lives. Stewardship manifests itself in each of our daily priorities, choices, and actions. Let's always try to act the way we do during communion. It would be a much more pleasant world if everyone did so.

Don Hafer, for the Stewardship Committee

Stewardship is what we do after we say we believe.

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If you would like to make a commitment to God and Saron but did not have an opportunity to do so earlier, it's never too late to return a commitment form or a Time & Talent survey sheet. There are additional forms in the narthex or contact the church office if you need one mailed or emailed. Your consideration is appreciated as we prepare for 2026. Thank you!

Worship

ASSISTED HEARING DEVICES

Our sound system in the sanctuary came with headphones to assist those having difficulty hearing the worship service. If you are interested, ask Marcus if you can try one out.

SENSORY BAGS

As part of extending an unconditional welcome to all, we have Sensory Bags available for use. These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus. We also have noise canceling headphones for those who are sound sensitive. These brightly colored bags can be found in the narthex.

PRAYER GROUP

You are invited to offer your concerns or thanksgivings via our attendance cards each Sunday. Requests can also be made online via a link in our Thursday email. You may include as much, or little, detail as you wish. Requests are then given to the Monday prayer group. **You are invited to be part of this Monday group at 11am.** We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes.

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by contacting the church office. Please note any occasion/thanksgiving to be recognized in the bulletin. **Flowers are now $40 per vase.** Checks are payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Take them home to enjoy then please **return the vase.**

Nursery service is available during worship for children under five years old (exceptions are made, especially for siblings). There is a live-feed monitor in the nursery where you may keep up with the service if you need to stay with your child. For children five and older, there are options to bring into the sanctuary, such as clipboards with coloring pages, sensory bags (see article above) and children's bulletins. If you need to step out with them to regroup, there are quiet activities in a bin next to the sofa in the narthex. We embrace family units in all stages and welcome wiggles & giggles as a part of worship.

We recognize the worship experience for families may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions with Mackenzie Dressander (269/944-7753). Please also contact her if you are willing to volunteer to support this important service.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

December 7: 2nd Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12

December 14: 3rd Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 35:1-10
Psalm 146:5-10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

December 21: 4th Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 7:10-16
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-25

December 28: 1st Sunday of Christmas
Isaiah 63:7-9
Psalm 148
Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 2:13-23

Youth Group (middle school & high school age) is still trying to work out a schedule for meetings that will work for our busy students/athletes/artists.

Contact Chuck Knebl at chasknebl@comcast.net with any questions or to be added to the email list.

Learning

SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

The Learning Hour offers the following options:

- 9:40am-10:30am Adult Forum: High School - Adult
- 10am-10:45am Confirmation: Grades 6-8
- 10am-10:45am Sunday School: Preschool - Grade 5
    - New Classroom!
    - New Curriculum!
    - New Friends!

Youth Christmas Service with Children's Pageant!

Sunday, December 14
11am

You do **NOT** want to miss this cuteness!

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

Acts of Faith: Tongues of fire, a *Treasure Island*-style sea voyage, Paul's preaching literally boring a man to death: the book of Acts is a feast of the works of the Holy Spirit! Join our Wednesday morning Bible study as we continue to explore this "act"ion-packed book, every Wednesday at 9:30am in the upstairs lounge (even during Advent!). No special materials needed. Come when you can! Contact Pastor James with questions.

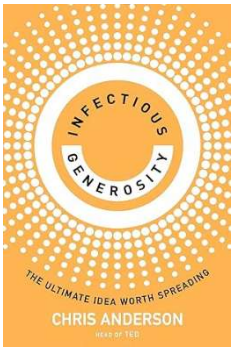
TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

This group is taking a well-earned break during Advent and will pick up again on **January 13**. We will focus on the lessons of the week until Lent. Join us when we can on Tuesday evenings at 6pm in the upstairs lounge. We meet for one hour of discussion, then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship. All are welcome!

If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Don Hafer (269/985-3637, haferdon@gmail.com)
Ed Staude (636/288-1016, staude.edmund@gmail.com)
Eric Standen (269/759-3556, dande-standen@sbcglobal.net)
Pr. James (269/816-3870, pastorjames@saronlutheran.org)

BOOK CLUB

December 7, 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge, we will be discussing ***The Waiting: The True Story of a Lost Child, A Lifetime of Longing, and a Miracle for a Mother Who Never Gave Up*** **by Cathy LaGrow**. In 1928, 16-year-old Minka was assaulted and raped resulting in a pregnancy. The baby, Betty Jane, was secretly adopted. Minka searched for her for 77 years. Eventually, Minka's granddaughter, Cathy LaGrow writes Minka's story. Three generations of family, with a Lutheran connection, shows that faith, hope and love do triumph in real life. Good reading for the Christmas season.



We are taking off the month of January, continuing again on **February 1 with *Infectious Generosity: The Ultimate Idea Worth Spreading*** **by Chris Anderson.**

Please join us for either or both of these book discussions. Everyone is welcome at any or all of our meetings. Questions? **Contact Kathy Cowall at 269-428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.**

You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.
- Ray Bradbury

FORUM & fellowship

We will break for Advent & Christmas and meet again in the new year. **Contact Ed Staude at 636/288-1016 with any questions.**

Women of the ELCA

DEBORAH CIRCLE

We will **NOT** meet in December. **January 14, 2026 at 6pm**, is the date for our Christmas party at the home of Linda Pater. Details will be available closer to that time.

Contact Melanie at 269/449-8399 with any questions.

MENTOR FAMILY FUND

It Takes A Village

In the past, Saron's women's group has collected money for our mentor fund through bake sales and other monetary contributions. These funds have been used to help people with utility bills, medical concerns, food for holidays, Christmas gifts and miscellaneous needs. If you know of anyone who may need a little "boost up," please contact **Linda Pater at 269/369-1178.** A big thanks to all who have supported our efforts. **Contributions are always welcome at any time of year and checks may be written to Saron Church Women.**

Hospitality

SUNDAY SNACKS

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship after the service? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for at least 30 to partake. Thank you!

Outreach

NOISY OFFERING

We receive a noisy offering (and those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month. These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Thank you for your continued support!

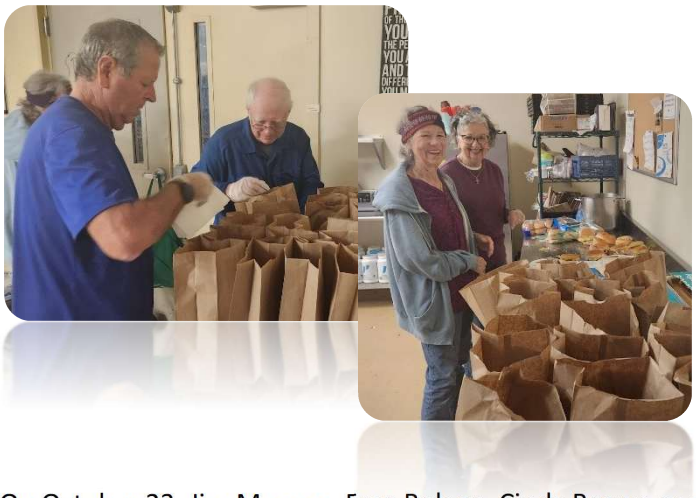
LEAF WRANGLING IN OUR COMMUNITY

Saron was once again a blessing to a family in our community. Josh is a teacher and single father of a young child with a disability. This took a huge weight off his shoulders!

Big thanks to Jim Manore, Brad Frey, Steve & Kris Bell, Linda & Rick Taylor, Amanda & Alaina Bradley (and Key Club friends), and Pastor James for making this happen for Josh!

THE BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN™
HEART-TO-HEART™

Simple food, honestly sourced and lovingly made creates connections, gives fuel to the fight, and starves ignorance and apathy.
-Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen



On October 23, Jim Manore, Fran Bolson, Cindy Brown and Dave & Kathie Bradley assembled and delivered 150 sack lunches to the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen. The lunches included a sandwich, chips, fruit and cookies baked by Sally Schmuhl, Fran Bolson, Marilyn Lucy, Kathi Anserello and Keith Stevens.

The Soup Kitchen purchased the former Lark's BBQ on Main Street in Benton Harbor. During the extensive renovation, Saron assembled sack lunches at Red Lotus Nutrition and delivered them to the Soup Kitchen to be distributed. We would like to thank Red Lotus for allowing us to pack the lunches in their commercial kitchen. The Soup Kitchen expects to reopen before the end of the year.

Thanksgiving and Christmas are being sponsored by other organizations so we will not need volunteers or cookies until January. If you ever have questions about this outreach effort, contact Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665.

Thank you to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!

EYE GLASS COLLECTION

Do you have old glasses sitting in a drawer? Lions Club has provided a collection box in the narthex. We have several members who are Lions that can deliver our glasses to the club where they will do more good. Thank you!

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.

If you ever have any questions on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:

Lindsay Gaspari:847/373-8826 lindsay.gaspari@yahoo.com
Meredith Gacek:269/235-4530 meredithgacek@yahoo.com

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

Contact Pastor James or Merrily Smith at merrilyannsmith@gmail.com for more information on this group.

Support

The Support Committee typically meets the Tuesday before the third Monday of the month at 8pm via Zoom. Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with a brokerage firm to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Ed Brunner at ebrunner54@gmail.com to receive more information. Thanks!

Facilities

HELPING HANDS

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands!

Miscellaneous Bits of News

Saron Lutheran Church
1875 | 150th Anniversary | 2025

- **PRAYER & MEDITATION GARDEN**
  - Future plans for the space relocating the Japanese maple to a new spot in the ground (the current above ground planter is rotting), elemental sculptures, additional landscaping and signage to encourage the community to enjoy the space and reinforce our welcome to all.
  - **The extent of our work on the Community Prayer & Meditation Garden is directly tied to the funds we collect. If you would like to contribute, make sure your donation is marked "Prayer Garden."**

We wrap up our year of making new memories while commemorating our past with our final events:

- **December Event**:

CELEBRATION OF SANTA LUCIA

Sunday, December 14 at 3pm

This year Saron is co-sponsoring with Vasa (local Swedish-American fraternal, cultural and educational organization) the annual celebration of Santa Lucia. The program will include the telling of the story of St. Lucia, music of the season, hymn singing, and the presentation of the 2025 Lucia and her court. Swedish refreshments will be served. This event is free and open to all.

- **Finale Event: January 11 with Bishop Julie!**

DECEMBER 2025

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 11am Prayer Group	**2**	**3** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study **6:15pm Soup Supper with Reader's Theater**	**4** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**5**	**6**
7 2nd Sunday of Advent 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**8** 11am Prayer Group	**9** 8pm Support Meeting	**10** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study **6:15pm Soup Supper with Hanging of the Greens**	**11** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**12**	**13**
14 3rd Sunday of Advent 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Children's Pageant Practice 11am Youth Christmas Service with Zoom Option 3pm Festival of Santa Lucia	**15** 11am Prayer Group 6pm Council Meeting **Newsletter Articles Due**	**16**	**17** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study **6:15pm Soup Supper with Hymn Sing**	**18** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**19**	**20**
21 4th Sunday of Advent 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**22** 11am Prayer Group	**23** 9am Helping Hands	**24** **Christmas Eve Worship 4pm & 8pm**	**25** **Christmas Day Worship 10am**	**26**	**27**
28 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**29** 11am Prayer Group	**30**	**31** 9am Helping Hands 			

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
ST. JOSEPH, MI 49085

Website: saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org

A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

DECEMBER 2025 NEWSLETTER

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH 2025 ADVENT & CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAYS, DECEMBER 3, 10 & 17

Advent Soup Suppers at 6:15pm followed by Activities
(see inside for details)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

Youth Christmas Service at 11am
"Unto Us A Son Is Given"
On-location & via Zoom

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship at 4pm & 8pm
(No Childcare)
On-location and via Zoom

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

Christmas Day Worship at 10am
On-location & via Zoom